

Dragonshards

Druids of Khorvaire, Part Four

By Keith Baker



This series on druids concludes with a look at another tradition of the east: the Horse Watchers of the Tairnadal elves, which are found in Valenar and Aerenal.

The Siyal Marrain (Horse Watchers)

The Tairnadal have tremendous respect for the power of nature. Many of the greatest heroes of the elves have been rangers, who combine martial skill with a magical bond to the natural world. During the uprising against the giants on Xen'drik, Tairnadal druids countered the magic of the giants with storm and thunder, and they bolstered the ranks of the elf army with the beasts of the wilds. A number of the druids joined the battle in animal form, and the greatest Tairnadal rangers rode into battle astride druids who used wild shape to assume the forms of mighty stallions. In one of the most fearsome battles of the uprising, a giant wizard of the Sul'at League laid a terrible curse on the opposing druids, forever binding them in animal form. The Tairnadal believe that the spirits of these champions of nature live on in their descendants, and they hold that these beings deserve the same respect as the other heroes of history. For a Tairnadal cavalry warrior, a horse is not simply a tool or a weapon: He is a brother striving toward the same destiny. Valenar rangers prize the ability to *speak with animals* as a way to strengthen their bond with their mounts. The typical Valenar ranger possesses a horse as her animal companion, and she believes that the improved abilities of the horse are a sign of the horse's ancestral guide. Druids capable of casting *awaken* are rare, but a few of the great champions of the modern age ride *awakened* steeds.

The druids of the Valenar serve two roles. First and foremost, they are charged to preserve the bloodline of the elven horses. The druids protect the breeding grounds, tend to injured horses, and help raise the young. These blood guardians mingle with the herd using wild shape and *speak with animals*, forging the bond between horse and elf from the earliest days. They also help to match elf and rider, working to forge the bond between

Warhorse, Valenar

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 4d8+16 (34 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 90 ft. (18 squares)

Armor Class: 15 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+11

Attack: Hoof +6 melee (1d4+4)

Full Attack: 2 hooves +6 melee (1d4+4)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: Combative mount, low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +4

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 2, Wis 16, Cha 10

Skills: Jump +26, Listen +6, Spot +5

Feats: Endurance, Run

Environment: Warm plains

Organization: Domesticated

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 5-9 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment: --

Most Valenar elves use riding horses, albeit trained for battle. However, a line of true Valenar warhorses exists. Such mounts are never sold, not even to the elves themselves: A warrior who seeks a Valenar warhorse must prove his worth to the Siyal Marrain and the horse itself. Valenar warhorses are fiercely loyal, and most will die before they will accept a rider of another race; however, in a few cases the Horse

rider and mount. Beyond this, the Siyal Marrain are warriors. Just as their ancestors fought the giants with lightning and flame, the druids of the modern day may ride with a warband, turning the power of nature against their enemies.

Horse Watchers typically possess maximum ranks in Handle Animal and Ride. Many take Mounted Combat and its related feats; the composite longbow is a traditional weapon of the order, and Mounted Archery is another common choice.

Druids of the Siyal Marrain cannot take any of the sect feats (Ashbound, Child of Winter, Gatekeeper Initiate, Greensinger Initiate, or Warden Initiate) presented in the ***Eberron Campaign Setting***. However, a Siyal druid does gain access to three additional spells, which are added to the druid spell list at the indicated level: 1st-level -- *mount*; 3rd-level -- *phantom steed*; 4th-level -- *spirit steed*. The druid loses access to these spells if she abandons the traditions of her people.

Valenar Horses

The Valenar riding horse can be found on page 289 of the ***Eberron Campaign Setting***. Aside from its enhanced speed and Dexterity, a Valenar horse can live for up to ten times the lifespan of a normal horse; the Tairnadal attribute this longevity to the elven blood they believe runs through the veins of the steed. A typical Valenar cavalry soldier has served with his horse for decades, and the two have a tremendously strong bond: A Valenar will certainly seek vengeance against anyone who kills his horse.

Ever since the Valenar arrived on Khorvaire, the magebreeders of House Vadalis have sought to capture Valenar steeds so that they can produce a dynasty of improved horses; many a Vadalis baron dreams of the gold that he could acquire from selling herds of magebred Valenar horses. To date, however, their efforts have failed. House Vadalis has acquired a number of Valenar horses over the decades, but it has yet to make them reproduce in captivity; while the horses do not appear to be sterile or under the effects of malign enchantment, even those compelled to reproduce with *charm animal* simply produce normal offspring, lacking the superior abilities of the Valenar horse. House Vadalis sages have come up with a number of different theories to explain this mystery. Some say that the enhanced abilities of the Valenar horses are a result of being raised in the powerful Irian manifest zones of Aerenal. Others think that there is a small herd of breeding stallions that the elves have kept hidden from spies and thieves. A third theory espouses the idea that the enhanced abilities *are* the result of a bond to elven ancestors, just as the Tairnadal claim, and that horses bred without the blessing of a Blood Guardian never receive their full gifts. Whatever the truth, House Vadalis still yearns to overcome this obstacle, and any adventurers who can solve the mystery and help them produce their own herds of Valenar horses would be rewarded handsomely!

Watchers have helped those who have performed great services for the Valenar to form a bond with one of these steeds.

A Tairnadal druid can take a Valenar warhorse as an animal companion at 4th level, following the standard rules for advanced animal companions. A Valenar warhorse can fight while carrying a rider, but the rider cannot also attack unless he or she makes a successful Ride check.

Combative Mount (Ex): The rider of a Valenar warhorse gets a +2 circumstance bonus on Ride checks. The warhorse is proficient with light, medium, and heavy armor, although the Valenar rarely use heavy barding.

Carrying Capacity: A light load for a Valenar warhorse is up to 300 pounds; a medium load, 301-600 pounds; and a heavy load 601-900 pounds. A Valenar warhorse can drag 4,500 pounds.

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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